

PROGRAM #9 - ROBERT FULTON

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Robert Fulton, engineer and inventor, was born in Lancaster County, Pa., Nove. 14, 1765. He showed inventive talent at 13 by fastening paddle wheels to a boat so it could move without poling. At 20 he was a successful Philadelphia artist. The following year, Benjamin Franklin encouraged him to go to London to study painting. Before he was 30, Fulton had exhibited his paintings at the Royal Academy, invented a method of lifting boats without the use of locks and developed a canal-dredging machine. He also invented a flax-spinning machine, a rope-twisting device and a marble cutter. His achievements were compared with those of another artist-scientist - Leonardo da Vinci.

In 1797, during the French Revolutionary Wars, Fulton succeeded in interesting France in the possibilities of a submarine and a torpedo. His submarine, the "Nautilus," made a good impression and he was authorized to hunt down and sink British warships. When none were sunk, Napoleon lost interest. Then, under the auspices of Robert Livingston, American Minister to France, Fulton built a steamboat - which promptly sank in the River Seine. A second attempt in 1803 was more successful, encouraging him to return to America in 1806 for yet another try at building a practical steamboat. On Aug. 17, 1807, Fulton's "Clermont" made its historic New York-Albany round-trip voyage on the Hudson in 62 hours, opening a new era in American history. He married Livingston's niece that same year. Robert Fulton died in New York City on Feb. 24, 1815, a national hero and a symbol of our American ingenuity.